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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2687
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7390
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5121
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000249

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NEW FOREIGN MINISTER AFFIRMS COMMITMENT
TO DEVOLUTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: A) COLOMBO 175 B) COLOMBO 232

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador paid his initial call on new Foreign Minister Bogollagama on February 8. Ambassador reviewed U.S. support for Sri Lanka in its fight against LTTE terrorism. He also underlined serious U.S. concerns about Sri Lanka's deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation and urged the government to take urgent corrective action. Bogollagama inquired about a letter 38 U.S. representatives reportedly sent to President Bush requesting appointment of a U.S. Special Envoy for Sri Lanka. He mentioned that he planned to travel to the U.S. in the time frame March 7) 19, and would seek an appointment with Secretary Rice. Septel reports Ambassador's discussion with

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the Minister on Iran and Middle East issues. End summary.

12. (C) Ambassador and Pol Chief met with new Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama on February 8. Bogollagama noted that his relationship with the U.S. Embassy, which had started as a personal, professional one, had grown into a bilateral one. (Bogollagama was the Embassy's attorney for negotiations in the 1990s with the Sri Lankan Government, GSL, over the VOA transmitter).

13. (C) Ambassador congratulated Bogollagama on his new appointment as Foreign Minister, saying that it was a confirmation of the trust and confidence that President Rajapaksa reposed in him. The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. was a steadfast friend of Sri Lanka and supporter in its fight against LTTE terrorism.

14. (S) Ambassador reviewed the efforts that the U.S. was making to help Sri Lanka, including designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization, freezing of LTTE accounts, formation of the Contact Groups on financing and arms trafficking, and the investigation and arrests of key figures in the LTTE weapons procurement programs. The U.S. was also helping with radars for maritime interdiction and in

intelligence-sharing on suspected LTTE vessels.

¶5. (C) The point to these activities, Ambassador said, was to show the LTTE that it had nothing to gain by dragging out the ethnic conflict. "They should not believe that they will ever get a better deal." The U.S. would continue to tighten the noose to help persuade the Tigers that the time to negotiate was now.

¶6. (C) Referring to his remarks at the Jan 28 Development Forum in Galle, Ambassador reiterated the U.S. belief that a purely military solution was neither possible nor desirable. He underlined the urgency of developing and putting forward a viable devolution proposal that could form the basis for a negotiation and eventual settlement of the conflict.

¶7. (C) Bogollagama noted that the All-Party Representative Conference under the leadership of MP Tissa Vitharana was laboring to produce the proposal. However, it was likely this would take another six weeks. He assured us that the GSL shared the view that the ultimate way forward was to convince the LTTE to enter the political mainstream through a devolution offer that the Tamil community would have to consider.

¶8. (C) Ambassador informed Bogollagama that he had had numerous frank and friendly conversations with previous Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera on the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. In our view, Ambassador said, the climate of fear this engendered was taking a serious toll on civil society in Sri Lanka. He reviewed the various fora in which Sri Lanka's human rights situation would be at issue in the next few weeks, including UN Security Council working group consideration of the

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Secretary General's report on Children and Armed Conflict and SIPDIS
a likely draft resolution at the March session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

¶9. (C) Ambassador also made it clear that the U.S. Human Rights Report due in March would present a clear, unflinching assessment of the deterioration we witnessed in 2006. He noted that he had urged Sri Lanka's senior leadership, including the President, to take urgent action on human rights in order to pre-empt some of the criticism. Otherwise, pressure for international monitoring would only increase. He told Bogollagama one important step for the government would be setting the country's constitutional house in order by solving the impasse over the Constitutional Council under the 17th Amendment. Then, appointments to other government bodies essential for the system of checks and balances could move forward.

¶10. (C) Bogollagama expressed concern about reports that 38 U.S. representatives had sent a letter to President Bush requesting appointment of a U.S. Special Envoy for Sri Lanka. Ambassador responded that we had not yet seen the letter and had no position on it as yet. The Administration would make a decision in due course on how to respond to it.

¶11. (C) Ambassador said that while the U.S.-nominated member of the Independent International Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) was not a special envoy per se, the U.S. was glad to have the opportunity to help Sri Lanka investigate its most serious cases of human rights violations. He praised Dewey as a sensible, pragmatic man who would contribute significantly to the IIGEP's work of supporting the Sri Lankan Commission of Inquiry. It was essential that these bodies make serious progress, the Ambassador added. For that reason, the U.S. was also providing a technical-level expert to assist Dewey and the International Panel.

¶12. (C) Bogollagama concurred that the GSL needed to address

past human rights abuses as a matter of the greatest urgency.

Most important, he said, Sri Lanka needed to do this for itself) and not merely as the result of external pressure.

¶13. (C) Ambassador informed Bogollagama that he was working along with Minister for Human Rights and Disaster Assistance Mahinda Samarasinghe and Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa in the Coordinating Committee on Humanitarian Access. There were still a number of problems to work out on access to Sri Lanka's more than 200,000 internally displaced persons. Ambassador added that he greatly appreciated Samarasinghe's participation in a joint press conference with several Ambassadors to highlight the excellent work that NGOs have been performing in this area. This helped to counter the mistaken impression that the NGOs were in Sri Lanka with the goal of helping the LTTE.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: We know Bogollagama well from his previous position as Minister of Enterprise Development and Investment Promotion. He was also Minister of Industries in the previous UNP administration. This initial meeting was useful to brief an important new Cabinet figure on matters of concern to us in the bilateral relationship and the political realm. While he generally responded well to our concerns and said the right things, we will have to see whether he will be able to convey tough messages to the President, and whether he will have real clout within the Cabinet. Bogollagama has an ambitious program of travel (ref B) and has recently returned from India (ref A) and Germany. He told us he would like to travel to the U.S. sometime between March 7) 19 and will request a meeting with Secretary Rice.

¶15. (C) ACTION REQUEST FOR SCA: Please advise which dates in this time frame might work and if, in principle, the Secretary would be prepared to meet with him.

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